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SUBJECT: UNHCR DONORS VISIT SOUTH KIVU

REF: A. KINSHASA 00224

[B](#). GENEVA 00589

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: UNHCR hosted a field mission for donors to South Kivu February 14-16. This mission gave donors an opportunity to view firsthand the current state of affairs, infrastructure, political climate and security concerns surrounding processing of refugees in South Kivu. The mission also afforded the delegation the opportunity to meet with South Kivu UNHCR, other UN agencies, provincial and territorial officials, relevant partners and contractor personnel.

#### The Delegation

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[1](#)2. (SBU) The group traveling to South Kivu consisted of representatives from the French and Danish foreign ministries, the German and Swedish permanent missions to Geneva, the Belgian and U.S. Embassies in Kinshasa, the Swiss Ambassador to the DRC, ECHO-DRC, the USAID/DRC Director, the UNHCR Representative to the DRC and the UNHCR/DRC External Relations Officer, in addition to a staff member from UNHCR-Geneva.

#### The Mission

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[1](#)3. (SBU) Following a January 20, 2005 tripartite agreement between the DRC, Tanzania and UNHCR, (REF A) MONUC, other UN agencies, partners and donors began to measure needs prior to the scheduled return of approximately 150,000 refugees from Tanzania. Local UNHCR staff piloted the delegation in South Kivu. The group visited Bukavu, Uvira, Baraka and Fizi, and concentrated on regional security issues, refugees leaving South Kivu for Rwanda and Burundi, Congolese returnees, and issues of food, housing, education and health.

#### South Kivu Security

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[1](#)4. (SBU) While peace is slowly returning to South Kivu, it is fragile and security issues limit UNHCR activities in the province. A wide variety of Congolese armed groups and Rwandan and Burundian rebels continue to operate in South Kivu. The insurrection in May/June 2004 was a major setback for UNHCR and humanitarian efforts in general, and the GDRC's failure to provide regular pay to military personnel has provoked renewed incidents of armed robbery in towns, and ambushes followed by looting of vehicles in the field. Thousands of government soldiers (FARDC) and dependents have been sent to the Kivus without pay, food or support leading many to prey upon the civilian population. The delegation had an opportunity to meet with the commanding officer of the 10th Military Region, General Mabe, who was candid regarding his limited ability to bring security to the region. He reported that he was without material and means to enforce peace and stability in the province.

#### Repatriation of Rwandan and Burundian Refugees

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[1](#)5. (SBU) UNHCR manages ten assembly points in the rural areas of South Kivu which feed voluntary returnees to a transit center in Bukavu. Returnees normally stay for 2-3 days in each facility and are provided with basic assistance including health care. The delegation met with 53 Rwandan refugees, mostly young women, children and infants who were being repatriated. UNHCR reported that each week 100 or more Rwandans voluntarily return with their assistance, and are transferred from Bukavu to the Nyagatare (Cyangugu) transit center in Rwanda. The refugees are then transported by UNHCR Rwanda to their prefecture of origin. UNHCR Bukavu estimates that they will facilitate the return of 14,000 Rwandan refugees this year. From January 1, 2000 until the end of 2004, UNHCR Sub Office Bukavu has facilitated or promoted the voluntary repatriation of 73,340 Rwandan refugees and estimates there are 86,317 remaining. Because of the instability in Burundi, UNHCR expects few of the estimated 19,252 Burundian refugees in the

DRC will return this year.  
Returning Congolese Refugees

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16. (SBU) UNHCR estimates that between 30,000 and 50,000 Congolese have voluntarily repatriated from Tanzania since the beginning of 2003, and that a further 150,000 refugees are registered in camps in Tanzania. In addition, an unknown number are not registered or in camps. UNHCR reports that there are several elements that are encouraging refugees to come back to the DRC, some of which are referred to as "push factors." These include reduced rations, official Tanzanian encouragement to return home, and lack of land, employment or opportunity. There are "pull factors" also at work, such as reports of peace in the DRC, the requirement that would-be voters must be on Congolese soil to vote in upcoming DRC elections, and the actions of DRC political figures such as the governor of South Kivu, who is actively encouraging returns. Spontaneous returns from Tanzania generally arrive on the shore of Lake Tanganyika between Uvira and Baraka. Most refugees currently in Tanzania will return to this region, however, much of the infrastructure, housing and economy that they remember was destroyed in the war.

Food, Housing, Education and Health

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17. (SBU) FOOD - Although the Kivus were once the breadbasket of the DRC, conflict beginning in 1996 has decimated agriculture, including small-plot subsistence farming. In addition, the rapidly-spreading Cassava Mosaic Virus and the Banana/Plantain Wilt threaten to wipe out the staple items of the local diet as well as large contributors to the local economy. The mission to South Kivu visited a USAID/FAO project near Bukavu that is propagating Mosaic-resistant cassava. (Comment: This disease is a potential disaster, and could wipe out the main source of starch and greens in the region. End Comment.)

HOUSING - Following the Rwandan military pullout from South Kivu in 2002, the front between the former rebel RCD-G forces and Mai Mai forces see-sawed back and forth across the province. Villages were burned and housing was destroyed. Only since June 2004 has there been relative quiet, however, residents outside of Bukavu and Uvira have not spent what little resources they have left to rebuild housing units. Many are living in partially destroyed huts. Those with UNHCR tarps on the roof have some ability to keep out the rain. Families hosting returning relatives are out of room and resources. As more and more refugees return to the area, there will be no suitable housing.

EDUCATION - In Bukavu and Uvira, education is available to those who can afford it. The delegation visited a school in the territorial capital of Fizi. It, as with most of the infrastructure, was nearly totally destroyed. Although it has walls it has no roof, desks or benches, paper, pencils or books. Portions of the walls have been painted black for blackboards, but there is no chalk. Children bring dried cassava root to take the place of chalk. Nearly all students are boys. As is the case in the rest of the DRC, school is not free and parents with any resources at all prefer to educate their boys.

HEALTH - UNHCR and their partners have been able to provide health care to refugees in Bukavu and Uvira. There are international and local NGOs providing health care in these cities, however, the remainder of South Kivu is nearly without access. The delegation visited the shell of the hospital in Fizi. In May/June 2004 renegade RCD-G forces led by General Nkunda stripped the hospital of every piece of equipment and materials down to copper wire and electric switches. The only bit of equipment remaining was the frame of an examination table that was too heavy to lift. Doctors Without Borders - Netherlands has established a basic clinic in what was until as recently as June a working regional hospital. The clinic consists of one medical professional. The delegation viewed two cots and two mattresses on the floor. There was an examination table in the "maternity facility" and there were two IV poles. This is the only medical facility in the territory with a population soon to be swelled by 150,000 returning refugees. UNHCR estimates 200 per week are now returning.

COMMENT

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18. (SBU) Since the June 2004 insurrection that required UNHCR to withdraw to Goma for security reasons, it has been working with its partners and other UN agencies to rebuild its presence in South Kivu. The Sub Office

(SO) in Bukavu is working well and is fully staffed. UNHCR is readying an SO for Uvira and they are staffing up and supporting partners and contractors. Elsewhere in the province, assembly points in Shabunda, Baraka and Fizi have not been built as originally planned because of insecurity. In coming months, as elections come increasingly to the fore, increasing numbers of spontaneous returnees likely will overburden the resources available. Although UNHCR is attempting to support community-based capacity, they must do so without seeming to encourage returns until the government and local and international organizations can provide security and resources necessary to support returnees. End Comment.  
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